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Statement by Paul Filson, Director of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Connecticut State Council regarding **Raised Senate Bill No. 1 AN ACT INCREASING ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE, QUALITY HEALTH CARE.**— before the Public Health Committee

Good afternoon, Co-Chairs, Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee - I appreciate the opportunity to be here before you today. My name is Paul Filson and I am Director of SEIU's Connecticut State Council. The State Council represents over 55,000 active members in Connecticut. SEIU is Connecticut's largest union. We represent health care workers, building service workers, state/municipal employees and community college professors and staff.

SEIU members are politically active. Over 500 of our members hit the street last year working to elect national and state representatives who would fight for the interests of working families. We asked every politician to commit to fixing our broken health care system. Make no mistake about it, our system is broken and it needs to be fixed this year. Piecemeal and incremental approaches are not acceptable because we know the results of those approaches – they do not work.

Most of our union members receive quality health insurance through their collective bargaining agreements, but it comes at a cost. We must often choose between decent raises in salary or maintenance of benefits. Our contracts are sometimes unsettled for long periods of time because our employers demand we pay higher and higher percentages of the escalating health insurance costs. When you see union members on strike in Connecticut it is usually because health care benefits are being taken away.

Perhaps 10% of our members, over 5000, either do not have insurance or can not afford to buy family coverage. Those members drive our children in school buses, or provide care for the elderly or the disabled. Some members clean office buildings or teach courses as adjunct professors. Is it any wonder that school districts have trouble hiring quality drivers or that job turnover rates in some group homes is well over 100% per year? None of our members who

drive school buses or work as monitors on those buses has affordable employer provided health insurance. Just yesterday we interviewed a member who decided to buy health insurance through his company, Laidlaw. He was not sure what it would cost. His first paycheck was short \$453 because that is how much his family health insurance was per week -- \$453 per week or \$1800 per month. Needless to say, he dropped coverage immediately and is now using emergency rooms again.

SEIU is demanding a bold and comprehensive approach to fixing our healthcare system in Connecticut. We know that if there was political will and political backbone the legislature would pass dramatic reforms. Under our current system there is only one real winner -- insurance sellers. Every other stake holder loses. Sure there are many who have decent insurance and receive great health care, but every year those numbers are decreasing and the amount of money they pay goes up. Sure doctors earn a lot of money, but every year their administrative hassles grow and their universe of potential clients shrink because they can't afford to accept reimbursement from Medicaid. Sure hospitals have lots of fancy new equipment, but every year they lose massive amounts of money with uncompensated care. Our society can not continue to prop up this broken system.

Tax credits and mandate reduction and expanded Medicaid will not fix the system. They may help for a little while, but the longer we wait the more and more expensive it gets. The incremental approach still leaves thousands uncared for and societal costs unchecked.

Our current system is bureaucratic. Our current system rations health care. Our current system makes hundreds of thousands of people wait for long periods of time. Our current system concentrates on cure rather than prevention. Our current system limits choice. What more evidence is needed that we must act now to change.

Thank you for holding these hearings. A real solution does not need to be very complicated. Other countries have effective and better health care systems. Let's take the best ideas and make them better.